

Asian Older Immigrants' Perceptions on Depression, Dementia, and Elder Abuse

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Introduction

- Asian Americans comprise over 21 million people in the United States (U.S.) and approximately 12% are ages 65 and older.
- Studies have shown that those who immigrated to the U.S. experience difficulties with acculturation, language, financial stability, and social support, which can affect their overall health and well-being.
- This impact is more significant on older immigrants who are concurrently dealing with challenges related to aging.
- Vietnamese American (VA) and Korean American (KA) older adults are identified as a poverty group in Southern California facing multiple challenges.
- Health services including mental health services are known to be underutilized in VA and KA communities in the US.

Purpose

- To examine VA and KA older immigrants' perceptions of depression, dementia, and elder abuse.

Methods

- Participants included 10 VA and 10 KA older adults (≥65) in Orange County, Southern CA.
- Participants were recruited from Vietnamese and Korean community centers; an academic hospital affiliated Senior Health Center; and local senior centers.
- One-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted by bilingual interviewers (average interview length: 60 minutes).
- Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in verbatim.
- Thematic analysis were conducted by 2 independent coders using an on-line qualitative data analysis software (Dedoose).

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

	VA (n=10)	KA (n=10)
Age (median)	71	75
Gender (female)	6	8
Education (high school or above)	N/A*	10
Living status:*		
Alone	2	1
with child & spouse	0	0
with spouse	2	9
with child	2	0
with other(s)	2	0
Years living in US	21 (7-41)	36 (20-51)
Health Insurance (Yes)*	9	10
Comorbidity (> 2 chronic diseases)	7	6
English Proficiency (1=Cannot speak English, 5=Excellent)	2.1 (1-3)	2.9 (2-5)

Results

Table 2. Themes

Main Themes	Quotes
Knowledge on geriatric depression	<p>"I believe that depression is a very serious disease. This is because a lot of people who suffer from depression usually die by suicide.... In order to overcome depression, one must find a daily routine that works for them. I think that education is very important and necessary." – KA3</p> <p>"It is a heavy fact to the Vietnamese. Depression, especially to poor immigrant women they have to worry about the economy, health, new obstacles in the new environment, not receiving enough love and support from children and their husband, leads to more sick..." -VA1</p> <p>"The longer the elder has known and has been going to a particular doctor, the more likely the elder will go to this doctor when they feel sad or depressed.... Usually, the goal for the elders is to go back to Korea.... Yes, there are a lot of people who want to go back." - KA8</p>
Need for support	<p>"I don't share [my feeling sad] with them [healthcare providers]. Sometimes, I just take a bus to the beach and sat there until the evening." -VA9</p> <p>"In the United States, it is hard to make friends and is easy to become isolated because people lack in English. Life as an immigrant is harder than one thinks." - KA2</p> <p>"The elders in Korea get financial support from their children.... The elders who live here, it is harder and harder to receive financial support from their children" - KA6</p>
Concerns about dementia	<p>"The majority of old people have that [memory] problem. Now I keep forgetting things. I forgot to get off at the bus stop and it passed. I bought things that I didn't need and forgot to get things that I actually need." - VA9</p> <p>"One part of Korean culture is that people do not want to show their weaknesses.... There are many [Korean elders with Alzheimer's].... When this happens, the family members do not take care of the elders at home. They send them to a facility. This is why elders really do not want to become ill with this disease." – KA8</p>
Perceptions of elder mistreatment	<p>"A friend of mine is being mistreated.... Everyday she comes to my house crying about her life.... She needs to talk to a counselor... I am an outsider and I cannot say anything." - VA5</p> <p>"I heard a story that a son always yelled at his mother. He stole his mother's money to go to gamble." -VA10</p> <p>"The elders lose physical strengths and they are no longer able to support their children financially. If the elder loses this ability they should let go of their authority and control. If they insist being in control, they will start to clash with their children, which could lead to elder abuse." – KA4</p> <p>"This [elder abuse] is another problem that can be solved by raising our children well starting from when they are young.... His [my acquaintance] concern was that his daughter started to take away his belongings. I thought that this was because he did not raise his daughter in a right way." – KA8</p>

Results

- Although participants expressed the importance of educating VA and KA communities about geriatric depression, they were hesitant about discussing individual experiences of depression.
- Many discussed experiencing isolation and loneliness, indicating the need for support.
- Varying degrees of concerns related to dementia and its care were reported.
- VA and KA older adults described wide range of views on elder mistreatment based their life experiences and values.
- VA and KA older adults expressed that they are likely to report their mental health issues to healthcare providers with whom they have established strong rapport. Also, the older adults are likely to open up to healthcare providers who understand their cultural backgrounds and life stories.

Conclusion

- The findings emphasize that it is important for healthcare providers to assess VA and KA older immigrants thoroughly as they may be reluctant to disclose information related to mental health concerns.
- This study indicates that future outreach efforts need to include culturally appropriate education on depression, dementia and elder abuse; strategies to de-stigmatize these conditions in VA and KA communities; and interventions to strengthen social support and resources.

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